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Dear, Whoever You Are, I Don't Care Who You Are

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DEAR, WHOEVER YOU ARE, I DON'T CARE WHO YOU ARE

By

Adrienne Smart

A THESIS

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Dear, whoever you are, I don't care who you are

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University of Nebraska, 2015

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I am an observer. I have always been an observer. I was the child who sat quietly with the adults at dinner parties, listening intently to conversations both literally and figuratively over my head. I was the child my mother could count on to repeat the details she forgot from the phone conversation she had with a friend earlier that day. I was the child who knew all the names of the neighbors, their dogs, the cars they drove, the gossip being spread about them, etc. I've always been collecting. But to anyone outside of my trusted circle, I was far too reserved to let on to the archive of knowledge I'd been creating.

As an adult, I carry on this habit. I'm still the listener-- the participant. I act as both receiver and translator of information gained. I hold tight to shared experiences and information gained. I hold tight to shared experiences and connections made. As an artist, my work follows a similar path. I work to create a record of these experiences for myself and expose them to others.

This new record is made through writing, drawing, frottage rubbing, and printing- all traditional methods of analog recording using the body. It is an emotional act - returning to the stability of the human mark that carries the weight of past histories. This collective act serves as a link between the momentary interaction to be remembered (then) and the person making the recording (now). Frottage rubbing is reinforcement that the person/experience is not here-- the mark a measurement of absence, while drawing carries an inherent narrative that reveals my personal thoughts and hand in the process. Each act is a translation or reinterpretation of the “original” but in these cases, the copy becomes more real than that which it succeeds. The materiality of the paper makes the words feel more tangible in a way that the digital screen cannot seem to offer.

We live in a time of rapid transition in communication where much of what’s said is delivered by a device. I maintain an archive of data that makes up my collected digital conversation and seek to translate bits and pieces into a physical format. It is a compulsive attempt to make permanent the ephemeral nature of a conversational moment-- to capture the fleeting experience and make it last longer. There is thick anxiety throughout this archive-- anxiety of personality and culture; anxiety of safety and surveillance; anxiety of being heard. The curation of these fragments creates a new, implicit conversation of this larger common feeling.

The quick exchange of words throughout our day-- words stripped of personality without handwriting or voice-- give the impression of succinct and efficient communication. But in practice, it becomes more coded and more easily misunderstood and the act of

conversing does not guarantee communication. The tone and meaning are as much the responsibility, if not more, of the reader than the writer. There is great distance between the speaker and the receiver. But as the observer, I always try to bridge the gap.